

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION TRANSPORTATION 2035

GENERAL FOCUS GROUP: PARTICIPANTS RECRUITED FROM RANDOM PHONE POLL

MAY 12, 2008

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY: WALNUT CREEK

Planning for future transportation needs: Similar to the participants in the other focus groups, the Contra Costa County participants indicated that a majority of roads and highways in the Bay area are in need of maintenance. Moreover, three participants indicated that maintenance of existing systems should take priority. These participants emphasized the cost of the original investment, and that a first step in preparing for the future is to take care of what already exists. In contrast, 7 out of 10 participants prioritized expansion projects, particularly increasing public transit service in their community. These participants argued that growth in the area will require an increased reliance on public transit, and that there simply is not adequate land to further expand many highways and roads in the Bay area.

Maintain the existing system of roads, and the existing bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	3
Build new roads and add more bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	7

Each of the 10 participants indicated that they would spend up to 50 percent of the \$30 billion dollar budget on maintenance of existing transit systems. Although the participants mentioned a number of expansion projects that are critical to planning for the future, they emphasized that maintenance “is not a luxury, it is a necessity.”

up to 25 % (\$7.5 billion dollars)	0
up to 50 % (\$15 billion dollars)	10
up to 75 % (\$22.5 billion dollars)	0
100 % (\$30 billion dollars)	0

With the funds that remain from the \$30 billion dollar budget, the participants reported that they would invest in the following: expansion of roads and highways (5), expanding public transit systems (6) and increasing alternative transportation (1). Contrary to many of the other focus groups, half of the Contra Costa County participants specifically mentioned that funds should be spent to expand roads and highways.

Congestion relief: The participants unanimously agreed that traffic congestion will be worse in the future if funds are only spent to maintain existing systems.

Much better	0
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Somewhat better	0
No change	0
Somewhat worse	1
Much worse	9

Although more of the participants, when compared to most other focus groups, had specifically mentioned funding the expansion of road and highway systems, 9 out of 10 participants prioritized investments in public transit options in order to reduce congestion. The participants discussed the need for greater public transit service in their community. Since all but one of the participants reported relying on driving, the discussion also covered how public transit would need to change to better serve their area. Similar to other focus groups, the participants mentioned lower fares, free parking near transit hubs, expanded operation hours, increased availability of services near their home and/or work, increased security on buses and trains and in transit stations, additional information on how to ride public transit, and even adding pet-friendly public transit services. Several participants mentioned they enjoy walking or biking; however, this option was not viewed as viable given the long distances that many of them travel to work.

Highway systems to relieve traffic congestion, including ramp metering, high-occupancy toll lanes, etc.	1
Public transit options, including rail and buses to provide alternatives to driving.	9
Walking paths and bicycle lanes to provide alternatives to driving	0

Shown in the table below are the programs participants thought would be most effective in reducing truck volumes along freight corridors. Some of the participants indicated more than one option, so the responses total to more than 10.

Keep trucks out of the peak commuter hours	4
Allow smaller trucks to use carpool lanes during congested periods for a fee	0
Encourage more cargo deliveries be made by rail or ferries	2
Build exclusive truck lanes supported by trucking fees	4
Provide more truck parking in commercial business areas	1
<i>Enforce driving laws (e.g., keep trucks out of fast lane and fine when double-parked)</i>	1

Attitudes toward focused growth: Eight participants felt that incentives should be offered to communities that build more housing along public transit lines, whereas two participants felt that transportation funds should be distributed evenly. The former participants argued that these incentive programs would result in transportation funds being used more effectively in the Bay area. In contrast, the participants in favor of equal funding suggested that communities should be free to develop their own vision of the future and residents should not be punished for wanting to live in a more rural area.

Funds to communities that are planning to build more housing along BART and other public transit lines	8
Funds evenly to communities regardless of where they are planning to build homes	2

Providing transit access: The participants thought that the following groups would have difficulty paying public transit fares: elderly, students, large families, unemployed, minimum wage workers and low income households, and individuals with physical disabilities. When asked whether transit discounts should be available, approximately half of the group suggested that fares should be reduced for all riders. In response to this suggestion, several of the other participants argued that the cost of public transit would not be an adequate incentive to encourage use. Several of the participants already receive discounted fares from their employers, and they often find the schedule does not meet their needs. Otherwise, the participants favored a transit discount based on household income.

Emissions reduction: Overall, the group continued to prioritize investments in public transportation during the discussion on automobile emissions, and 7 out of 10 participants prioritized these programs over improving traffic flow. These participants argued that encouraging alternatives to driving would have the overall effect of improving traffic flow and reducing the cost of road and highway maintenance. Several participants also discussed that they would rely on public transit more if the schedules and routes were expanded, and that employers and transit agencies should develop more carpool programs. In contrast, 3 participants prioritized improving traffic flow. These participants emphasized that many residents do not have a choice, their work schedule or location necessitates that they drive. Interestingly, these participants did not view an expanded public transit system to be a viable alternative for many drivers.

Reducing tailpipe emissions and encouraging alternatives to driving, such as public transit, bicycling, walking, etc.	7
Reducing traffic congestion and improving traffic flow to make it easier to drive around the Bay area	3

The participants also suggested the use of incentive programs to encourage the owners of more polluting vehicles to purchase clean-air alternatives. It was also noted that many owners of older vehicles may not be able to afford more efficient models, and that these programs would be particularly important for them. Several participants also suggested that Bay area drivers be required to take lessons in driving more safely and efficiently in order to improve traffic flow.

Final thoughts on maintenance versus expansion projects: Following the discussion, one participant indicated that he would spend more on maintenance. Specifically, he mentioned that it would take longer than 30 years to change residents' preference for and reliance on driving. The other participants noted that maintenance is essential, but some simple changes to public

transit would increase ridership, such as offering BART service earlier and later in the day. In comparison to the comments earlier in the discussion, the participants focused on projects to expand public transit services.

up to 25 % (\$7.5 billion dollars)	0
up to 50 % (\$15 billion dollars)	9
up to 75 % (\$22.5 billion dollars)	1
100 % (\$30 billion dollars)	0

In addition to maintenance of existing systems, the participants also prioritized the following: incentives to communities that develop new housing near transit (3), reducing automobile emissions (1), increasing public transit services (4), and relief of traffic congestion (2).